

Popular Religion and Ritual

in prehistoric and ancient Greece
and the eastern Mediterranean

edited by

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Mass and elite in Minoan peak sanctuaries

Matthew Haysom

Introduction

Two parallel visions of the nature of cult at peak sanctuaries have long co-existed within Minoan studies. One, gives to these sites a rustic and folksy air, regarding them as popular cult places frequented by pastoralists and farmers. The other, places them as important nodes within elite power structures, as arenas where the powerful propagated an ideology that cemented their control. The second of these visions is by far the oldest. The earliest scholars were not much interested in the social aspects of religion, questions of participation and power, concentrating instead on theological aspects – the identity and nature of divinities and the myths associated with them. However, on the basis of an image found on seal impressions from the Final Palatial destruction horizon at Knossos (CMS II.8 no.256) and the selective and garbled retrospection of Greek myth Evans interpreted the peak sanctuary on Juktas as the destination of kings seeking to commune with the mother goddess (Evans 1921: 151-163; for critique of the mythical aspect see Nilsson 1950: 73, 461-462). Indeed, the fact that the earliest known examples of peak sanctuaries were at Juktas and Petsophas, the first thought to be closely linked to Knossos and the second clearly intimately tied to the city of Palaikastro, meant that in early accounts peak sanctuaries had a distinctly metropolitan air. Scholars like N. Platon (1951: 156) closely followed Evans in seeing a regal connection for peak sanctuaries, primarily on the basis of the glyptic image from Knossos.

The other, more rustic, vision of peak sanctuaries gained prominence in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. It emerges most clearly in the work of Faure, one of the great pioneers in the study of these sites. For him, they were sites of popular cult, with a clientele of shepherds, farmers, sailors and pregnant women; explicitly opposed to the aristocratic cults attested in monumental buildings (Faure 1967: 148), they lacked any element of elite display or manipulation, being instead concerned only with the basic day to day worries of the simple people (Faure 1969: 212). Rutkowski, another of the great pioneers, emphasised similar qualities but sought to marry them to Evans' view, regarding peak sanctuaries as essentially and initially the rustic shrines of pastoralists that later gained the patronage of kings and urban elites who sought to control all aspects of religion (Rutkowski 1986: 94-95). It is no accident that this era saw both an

explosion in the number of these sites being identified and a solidification of the category, thanks in no small part to the work of the very same scholars.

Inevitably, these two visions of peak sanctuaries would eventually collide. When they did so, it was in the framework of a debate driven by processual theory. Following an account of peak sanctuaries emerging hand in hand with the palaces that dated back to Evans, Cherry (1978: 429-431; 1986: 29-32) argued that the two formed a nexus. The peak sanctuaries being tools by which palatial elites propagated a religious ideology to bolster their power. Peatfield (1987; 1990; 1994: 20-21), took on the role of defender of the alternate vision of peak sanctuaries. He argued that peak sanctuaries predated palaces, that they were too numerous and widespread in the Protopalatial period to be connected to palatial power centres, and followed Rutkowski in emphasising their rustic, pastoral concerns. According to Peatfield, elements of prestige material culture at them were concentrated in the Neopalatial period, a time that saw both the coming of palatial control and the centralisation of a previously widespread peasant phenomenon onto only a few remaining sites.

The chronology of the earliest stages of peak sanctuaries has become the key variable differentiating scholars with regard to where they situate themselves in relation to this argument. Haggis (1999: 74-6), for example, grounds his argument that peak sanctuaries are a separate and 'coordinate and co-evolving' phenomenon to palaces primarily on a firm assertion of their chronological priority in EM III-MM IA (though, unlike Peatfield, he emphasises elite involvement right from the beginning). Watrous (1996: 72-81), on the other hand, who sees peak sanctuaries and other extra-urban cult sites as arenas for power display over larger territories by urban elites, especially 'the family group resident in the palaces,' equally firmly places their emergence later in MM I. In contrast to chronology, several of the other key building blocks of the narrative seem to be more or less agreed by all parties. Certain items, such as metalwork and stone vases, are universally agreed to be symptoms of elite involvement at these sites. This is universally agreed to increase through time (though the details and precise timeframe vary from scholar to scholar), and within the elites most scholars emphasise 'palatial' involvement specifically.

The foundation of archaeological narrative: chronology

The centrality of the issue of chronology to the interpretive debate, together with the firmness with which opinions have been stated, is seriously at odds with the actual nature of our empirical knowledge and the state of primary publication. No example of a peak sanctuary has ever gone all the way from systematic excavation to final publication. The bare and eroded nature of the sites makes their stratigraphy difficult or impossible to discern. The pottery assemblages consist of masses of plain, difficult to date vessels, usually in worn and very fragmentary condition.

The arguments about when these sites begin are based on preliminary statements by the excavators of only a couple of them (Atsipades: Peatfield 1992: 71; for Juktas secondary sources refer to an unpublished Mycenaean Seminar given by Karetsou in May 1987). In the case of Atsipades evidence for Prepalatial activity comes in the form of two possible EM II cups. The rest of the pottery is described as only broadly datable to EMIII-MMII (Morris and Peatfield 1995). In the case of Juktas, where the preliminary reports describe the stratigraphy in some detail, it seems that occasional sherds that could be dated to Prepalatial periods were found in a red layer underlying the black layer that contained the first unequivocal signs of cult – ash and figurines. But even in this red underlying layer the Prepalatial sherds were intermingled with MM IB-II pottery (Karetsou 1978, 239-241 and 249). Under these circumstances it is certainly too early to follow scholars like Haggis in seeing peak sanctuaries as indispensable elements of Prepalatial landscapes and it may even be premature to make any definitive statement about their emergence in relation to that of palaces.

Even in later, better understood, periods, with greater quantities of published material, chronological problems persist. The finds typical of these sites, terracotta figurines, are very poorly typologized. There are very few from secure stratified contexts in settlements, so a solid sequence on which to hang stylistic dates is largely lacking. Moreover, the stratified settlement figurines are rather different as an assemblage from those in peak sanctuaries – at the most basic level in settlements the vast majority of anthropomorphic figurines tend to be female whereas at peak sanctuaries, when any indication of numbers is given, male figurines seem to predominate (Collard 1987 and Rethemiotakis 1998 provide lists of figurines from settlements; statements indicating more male than female figurines at peak sanctuaries include: Karetsou 1981: 146; Rutkowski 1991: 29; Karetsou and Rethemiotakis 1992-1993: 290).

Myres, an inexperienced excavator, in the first excavation of a peak sanctuary, dated all the figurines to the Protopalatial period. The stratigraphic grounds for doing so were deeply suspect and a great many experts, including Myres' more experienced contemporary Bosanquet, have shown suspicions about elements of his dating (Myres 1902-1903: 361 refers to Bosanquet's doubts; Peatfield 1987: 92; Rutkowski 1991: 14; Nowicki 1994: 31). Rethemiotakis' (1998: 59-60) study of anthropomorphic figurines has been a turning point, providing firm grounds for Neopalatial dates for some figurines previously given Protopalatial dates from sanctuaries like Kophinas, Traostalos or Petsophas. Some of the stylistic criteria used to assign figurines to the Protopalatial period may be less secure than once thought. Polychromy, is clearly attested in figurines from safe Protopalatial strata (Levi 1978: pl.LXIXc) but whether this means black or red ground and white over-painting necessarily give a Protopalatial date is more questionable. White on black was used to attain particular effects on pottery right down to the end of the Neopalatial and white detailing on red is relatively common in the east Cretan Neopalatial pottery repertoire (Cadogan 1978: fig.33). Black ground figurines of Neopalatial date have now been identified (Tzachili 2012: 234-235), the technique of painting white clothing over red-ground skin common on Petsophas male figurines is closely reminiscent of naturalistic wall painting, which only gets going in the Neopalatial period, and the only example of a male figurine with this technique from a stratified settlement context comes from an LM IB layer (Shaw 1996: no.2). Another supposedly Protopalatial feature is the high tiara-like hat or hairstyle. Again, this is clearly attested in the Protopalatial (or even Prepalatial) period, but this does not necessarily mean all examples are of such an early date. It may be attested as a form of adornment in Neopalatial glyptic (CMS II.6 nos.13 and 236; CMS VI nos. 287-8; CMS XI no.282; CMS XII no.168), appears at several peak sanctuaries with an intense Neopalatial phase of use (e.g. Juktas: Karetsou 1978: pl.169e apparently from a layer stratified above early Neopalatial pottery – compare pages 247 and 256; Traostalos: Davaras 1976, fig.138) and perhaps even on figurines from stratified Neopalatial contexts in settlements (e.g. Rethemiotakis 1998: nos. 75 and 146).

At present, Zeimbeki's study of the animal figurines from Juktas and Kophinas is the only in-depth study of a substantial corpus of terracotta figurines from a peak sanctuary benefiting from modern excavation (Zeimbeki 1998; 2004). As such, its conclusions are extremely important as a guide to future questions and to what similar studies might eventually reveal. She demonstrates that the difference between the more technically and stylistically advanced figurines of Kophinas, in comparison to those of Juktas, is not down to a chronological difference but due to different

local traditions at the two sites, with the ancient site of Juktas maintaining very long-running traditions of figurine-production through the Protopalatial right down to the Neopalatial period, whereas the younger site of Kophinas adopted the most up-to-date styles and techniques. If this turns out to be a more general pattern and one that extends to other types of figurine, then it would mean that the difference between those sites that have apparently more advanced figurines, such as Kophinas, Vrysinas or Prinias, and those which apparently lack the more advanced types may not be chronological so much as down to local tradition and practice. If that was the case then we should expect to find some sites where continued deposition over long periods of figurines that do not stylistically change because of ingrained tradition has led to figurine assemblages that are conventionally dated to the Protopalatial but pottery assemblages that continue into the Neopalatial. This is precisely the pattern that does seem to emerge at some sites as scholars seek to synthesise the available information (e.g. Modi: Jones 1999: 78; Philioremos: Faro 2008: 126; Three Peak Sanctuaries 2012).

There are very good reasons why any disjunctions between the supposed dates of figurines and the dates of the pottery assemblage would not emerge in the case of the vast majority of peak sanctuaries. Most peak sanctuaries are known only from surface prospection, hasty excavation and extremely brief unillustrated preliminary reports. Only one peak sanctuary has benefited from in-depth pottery study and, as with Zeimbeki's figurine study, the conclusions are vital to forming our assessment of probable broader patterns and future scholarly developments (Tzachili 2003; Faro 2008). At Vrysinas, it seems, there is a much higher instance of fine decorated pottery from the Protopalatial period than there is from the Neopalatial period. During the Neopalatial decorated ware disappears almost completely and the assemblage is dominated by hard to date types of plain or coarse ware, like conical cups, trays and cooking pots. A similar assemblage is suggested for the Neopalatial period from preliminary reports at Kophinas (Spiliotopoulou 2014). If this turns out to be a general pattern then it would not be too hard to see how harried excavators and surface prospectors elsewhere might have been biased towards Protopalatial dates by the greater proportion of distinctive decorated sherds.

The motif of peak sanctuaries initially being dated to the Protopalatial period only for further study to reveal continued (sometimes even more intense) Neopalatial activity is a consistent theme in peak sanctuary studies, which demonstrates that these dating distortions, biasing dating against the Neopalatial, are a real phenomenon (Petsophas: Myres 1902-1903 vs. Davaras 1980; Vrysinas: Davaras 1974 vs. Faro 2008;

Kophinas: Platon and Davaras 1960: 526 vs. Karetsou and Rethemiotakis 1992-1993; Traostalos: Alexiou 1963a: 405-406 vs. Chrysoulaki 1999: 311). This means that we should be extremely cautious about accepting narratives of elite-driven centralisation based on the apparent small number of peak sanctuaries currently dated to the Neopalatial. In central Crete, at least, such a linear developmental model may already be defunct. Here, newly excavated peak sanctuaries and re-studies of long-known examples seem to be revealing the early Neopalatial period as a particularly active and complex one with regard to peak sanctuaries. A period that seems to have witnessed abandonments (Sklaverochori: Rethemiotakis 2001-2004a: 340-342), but also perhaps new foundations (Liliano and Krousos Gournos: Rethemiotakis 2001-2004b; 2001-2004c; Kophinas: Karetsou and Rethemiotakis 1992-1993) and adjustments in setting and behaviour (such as the disappearance of buildings close to Juktas and on the route connecting it to Knossos, combined with new building at the site itself, Karetsou 2013: 89-90).

Distribution patterns

If, then, the state of the published evidence is not good enough for us to base interpretation on chronological patterning, and there are substantial indications that currently accepted chronological patterns are poorly founded, then we are left only with a synchronic assessment of the character of assemblages and with distribution patterns to turn to as the basis of interpretation. Both of these deserve to find a greater place in a debate that is currently driven by topographic considerations and statements about chronological development.

The best argument of those who resisted the 'palatial' nature of peak sanctuaries was always the broad-brush synchronic one regarding their distribution pattern: that not only are they very widespread in areas without any palatial centres, their wealth seems proportional to that of the communities in their immediate vicinity (Peatfield 1987: 92). Even if we take only that (probably artificial) subset with proven Neopalatial activity, there is no correlation between peak sanctuaries and palaces (see also Soetens *et al.* 2008). Malia lacks, thanks to the debunking of Profitis Elias, a peak sanctuary. Phaistos has a close visual, and at least in the Protopalatial period artefactual, relationship with Kamares cave and Mount Ida (Van de Moortel 2011). But Ida lacks a peak sanctuary and the assemblage at Kamares is nothing like that at peak sanctuaries. Kophinas, by contrast, is distant from Phaistos and a row of ridges blocks inter-visibility with the Mesara. There is no proven palatial centre in the immediate vicinities of Vrysinas, Philioremos, or Liliano. Traostalos is usually assumed to be related to Zakros but there is no inter-visibility between the

two and it is almost equidistant between Zakros and Palaikastro: its closest relationship is with the land and sea routes connecting these two major centres (Chrysosoulaki 2001: 64). All in all, this pattern may not disprove palatial patronage of Neopalatial peak sanctuaries but it does not provide any kind of empirical foundation for such a relationship either.

A more fine-grained examination of distribution patterns allows us to investigate patterns of patronage and interrogate elitist interpretations more precisely. Current understandings of elite (and by extension palatial) involvement in peak sanctuaries are based on only a couple of classes of object – metalwork (figurines, blades, jewellery) and stone vases (principally libation tables) – married to a couple of phenomena – architectural elaboration and the presence of inscriptions. By looking at the distribution of these items and phenomena in contemporary settlements we can gain some idea of the sectors of the population that could have had access to them. The last two can be dealt with quickly. It has now been well established that Linear A inscribed documents are well attested beyond the palaces and that there is little basis on which to argue that writing was confined to a ‘palatial’ elite (Schoep 1996; 2000; 2001). By far the largest building on a peak sanctuary belongs to Juktas, which is between about 150m² and 250m², depending on whether it originally had a, now destroyed, north wing. This puts it well within the size range of ‘normal’ Minoan houses (Whitelaw 2001: figs 2.4-2.5), meaning that the architectural elaboration on even the greatest peak sanctuary was potentially within the capabilities of numerous groups within Minoan society to commission. Bronze artefacts, including the distinctive thin symbolic double axes found at some peak sanctuaries, are widely distributed within Minoan households, including in relatively small houses and second or third tier sites (Haysom 2010), indicating that they were not monopolised by the upper strata of society. Libation tables, one of the most distinctive stone vase types at peak sanctuaries are also attested at households at a low point on any house-size hierarchy at second tier settlements, as in the case of those found in various households along the lower east road at Gournia (Boyd-Hawes 1908: pl. V 14, 15, 17, 18, 19). Only the gold finds, which are very small and occur in small numbers at only a few peak sanctuaries, have any claim to be a more restricted type (e.g. Karetsou and Koehl 2011). Even here, however, we should be cautious, as anthropomorphic destruction processes will have led to the disappearance of similar materials from settlements and we have no real idea of their original distribution. Spectacular finds, such as the ivory box from Mochlos, do suggest that rare imported materials were distributed occasionally far beyond the largest settlements and the most monumental buildings (Soles and Davaras 2010).

Those scholars like Faure who saw peak sanctuaries as popular peasant cult sites were not simply naïve. They were referencing a manifest phenomenon in the archaeological record, the rather underwhelming material record from these sites. No doubt they had at the back of their mind an implicit comparison with classical Greek sanctuaries (Faure tended to conflate the periods). This contrast is a real one. Almost all of the most impressive objects from Classical Greece come from sanctuaries, whereas almost all the most impressive items of Minoan culture come from settlements.

The symbolism of peak sanctuaries

There is nothing in the raw materiality of peak sanctuaries that demands an elite interpretation of them. Indeed, in comparison to the material wealth of contemporary settlements, regardless of the occasional gold bead or piece of foil, the materiality at these sites in simple terms of absolute wealth is relatively understated. But as religious places we cannot hope to understand them or their social role simply on the basis of quantification. The assemblages at them are symbolic and only by understanding the symbolism can we fully appreciate them.

The poor state of publication clouds the issue of the diversity of peak sanctuaries. There are signs that diversity did exist. At Traostalos, for example, the majority of bronze figurines are female whereas everywhere else male bronze figurines appear to predominate (Verlinden 1984: 183-184). The only assemblage of terracotta anthropomorphic figurines that is published is that from Petsofas (Rutkowski 1991). It is very highly selected and as comparanda we only have items on display in museums, brief preliminary statements by excavators and the occasional photograph (a partial list of published examples can be found in Verlinden 1984: 233-242). Some sanctuaries, like Juktas, clearly had much more diversity in their assemblages than others, including objects (marine-style pottery, a stone rhyton) that are rare or absent elsewhere (Karetsou 1978: 255; 1980: 343-344). In the space available I will only pick out a couple of patterns that are broadly attested, which seem interrelated, and which can shed some light on the sociological aspect of peak sanctuary activity.

As I have argued elsewhere, the analysis of symbolism needs to be based on patterns and connections within the broadly contemporary data-set (Haysom 2010). Importing interpretations, such as that votive limbs at peak sanctuaries must be to do with healing, on the basis of an external parallel, such as Christian *tamata*, is always dangerous, because it risks prioritizing the external interpretation over empirical patterning. The analysis that follows, therefore, is strictly based on

comparing the use of symbols in peak sanctuaries with that elsewhere in the Minoan material record.

Perhaps the most consistent pattern at peak sanctuaries is the large number of terracotta animal figurines. Wherever an indication of numbers is given the vast majority (77% at Juktas, 100% at Kophinas) are always said to be bovine figurines (Kophinas and Juktas: Zeimbeki 1998: 247; Traostalos: Chryssoulaki 1999: 314; Petsophas: Myres 1902-1903: 377; Vrysinas: Papadopoulou and Tzachili 2005: 1048; Atsipades: Peatfield 1992: 72; Skaverochori: Rethemiotakis 2001-2004a). They can vary in size from the thumbnail terracotta bulls found at Juktas to the large wheel made bulls of Kofinas, or Petsofas (Zeimbeki 1998). Other types of animal are more rarely and sporadically attested (see Kyriakidis 2005: table 21 for a rough presence/absence chart). But at Juktas, the only peak sanctuary where numbers beyond bovines are indicated, agrimia take the second place among quadrupeds (Zeimbeki 1998: 246). It is noticeable that when peak sanctuaries are attested by surface prospection bovine figurines rather than any other type almost inevitably make an appearance (e.g. Nowicki 2007: 6, 12). A predominance of bovine imagery is the closest thing to a constant amongst the symbolic repertoire of peak sanctuaries and, therefore, a good place to start in understanding them.

The symbolism of bovines has a considerable time depth all over Crete (e.g. Warren 1972: 220; Branigan 1970: fig.18). The argument that it was particularly associated with Knossos overlooks this (Hallager and Hallager 1995), even if at some point in its history Knossos sought to manipulate the image in distinctive ways. By the Neopalatial period, which gives us our richest iconographic horizon, bovine imagery was used in very particular ways. It is the most common animal in sphragistic iconography, where it often appears emblematically (Shapland 2010: fig. 4). However, it is by looking at interaction between bovines and people in iconography that we can understand the specifics of its cultural significance. In this sort of imagery, the interaction is predominantly competitive or violent, and almost invariably, the interaction is with men. Of the 28 glyptic images featuring a person interacting with a clear bovine deriving from a clear Neopalatial context only two are not violent/competitive (CMS V suppl.1A no. 173; CMS II.7 no. 29; the latter is also the only instance of interaction between a bovine and a female figure from the group). The omnipresent violence/competition in bovine-human interaction only becomes accentuated if one includes instances with an assumed, but not depicted, human agent, as in the cases of bovines pierced with missiles (e.g. CMS II.7 no. 60). Relief-decorated stone-vases provide the second richest vein of Neopalatial imagery. Bulls specifically – sex is clearer in this medium – are the most common animal depicted and in this case the

imagery is invariably violent and male orientated (e.g. Evans 1921: fig. 507; Kaiser 1976: pl. 5; Koehl 2006: no. 164). They are caught in nets, wrestled and leapt over. This same violent imagery is referenced more rarely in other media. Bull-askoid rhyta, like those from Pseira, have net patterns across their backs (Koehl 2006: pl. 2-3). Bull-relief fresco fragments from Knossos are found with the muscular limbs of athletes, and an ivory pyxis from Knossos shows men with javelins chasing a bull over a rocky landscape (Kaiser 1976: 278-279, 290; Alexiou 1967: pls. 30-33 – these last two are not securely Neopalatial coming certainly or possibly from later contexts).

There is a definite symbolic resonance between relief stone vases and peak sanctuaries, with both tending to select common symbols out of the much broader corpus of contemporary symbolism is attested in multiple ways. Scholars have long believed that tripartite buildings on these vases depicted in rocky landscapes, decorated with horns of consecration and flagpole-like pylons are images of peak sanctuaries (Platon 1951: 154-155; 1971: 163-167). This has occasionally been doubted (Platon 2003) but can be defended because it is part of a broader pattern of resonances. Juktas exhibits a unique concentration of large architectural horns of consecration (D'Agata 1992). The symbol is attested at several peak sanctuaries (Alexiou 1963a: 404-405; Davaras 1974: 211; Rethemiotakis 2001-2004b) and a find from Petsofas, which depicts a sequence of horns of consecration in the form of a tripartite building that is also reminiscent of a mountain range, seems to make the cluster of associations explicit (Davaras 1980). Relief stone vases are the main medium on which boxing is depicted. Arms with boxing gloves have now been identified at several sanctuaries (Rethemiotakis 2001: 126-128), and since these objects were initially thought to be phalloi (Peatfield 1992: fig.23), mentions of phalloi at other sanctuaries may indicate a much broader distribution of the boxing image through peak sanctuaries (e.g. Karetsou 1985: 289; Chryssoulaki 2001: 62). Studies of figurines at Kophinas even suggest diorama-like groups of fighting boxers were left at the site (Rethemiotakis 2014). Boxing iconography is not common in any other type of context. The famous boxer rhyton from Hagia Triada triangulates the connection between the buildings depicted on stone vases, bovines and boxing. The features usually identified as columns on this vase, around which men box and grapple bulls, are in fact the lower portions of the same pylons that are depicted on the peak sanctuary buildings (Alexiou 1969; Graham 1970: 231).

An extremely rare motif, that of a wavy edged 'baetyl', seen on the roof of the peak sanctuary building on the Zakros rhyton is also attested on terracotta trays from Juktas (Karetsou 1981: fig. 27). Similar trays appear to be a common element within peak sanctuary

assemblages (Faro 2008: fig. 5.13; Peatfield 1992: 70) and are depicted in use on another of the peak sanctuary depictions on a stone vase (Alexiou 1963b). Yet another relief vase depicts men marching in front of one of these buildings holding what appear to be stone ladles in their outstretched arms. As others have noticed this is an unusual type of vessel whose distribution is focussed on peak sanctuaries (Bevan 2007: 131, fig. 6.19). Finally, some objects from peak sanctuaries, such as relief scenes showing animals, perhaps agrimia, leaping amongst rocky landscapes, a bull-grappling figurine, and a diorama scene of a peribolos within a rocky landscape featuring a human figure leaving disc-like objects at a stepped niche, seem to mirror the iconography of relief stone vases directly (Karetsou 1977: 420; Tzachili 2011: chapter 1; Rethemiotakis 2001-2004a; Rethemiotakis 2001-2004b).

That these are instances of a common selection of specific motifs and not just the general accordance with patterns in contemporary iconography is shown by the absences. We might expect given the religious nature of the sites, for instance, that representatives of the large corpus of exotic or fantastic animals would turn up at peak sanctuaries. But animals such as lions and griffins, which are frequent on seals, have never been attested from one of these sites. Significantly, they have never been attested on relief stone vases either.

The multitude of the interconnections between the imagery on relief vases found in settlements and the objects found at peak sanctuaries makes the connection between the two incontrovertible and means that we should focus our attention on the symbolic concerns of this imagery as being one of the primary concerns of the sanctuaries. These vessels depict exclusively male iconography (Logue 2004; Marinatos 2005). As we have seen, there are signs that male figurines tend to predominate in peak sanctuaries. The images on the vases concern ritual, violence and competition between men, and between men and animals. The animals that are most attested at peak sanctuaries are those that men violently compete with on vases. The bronze blades, depictions of dagger-bearing men, and boxing gloves, at peak sanctuaries attest to the violence of symbolism at these sites (for bronze blades see Kofinas: Platon and Davaras 1961-1962: 288; Modi and Petsophas: Davaras 1972: 652; Vrysinas: Davaras 1974: 211; Juktas: Karetsou 1984: 609).

By tracing this symbolism contextually back to settlements in the same way that was done above with prestige objects we can gain a view of the sectors of society who particularly mobilized it. Here an interesting disjunction appears, because relief stone vases are relatively focussed in their distribution (Kaiser 1976 has the most comprehensive list). They are most numerous at Knossos, where they are widely

distributed. Unfortunately, none are in situ (most coming from surface or top soil layers) meaning we cannot say anything positive about their Neopalatial distribution at the site. Elsewhere in primary contexts, however, they are focussed in central buildings, at Zakros and Hagia Triada. Some of the most iconic images that these vases concern themselves with, boxing and particularly bull-jumping, seem to have been the subject of the finest naturalistic gold rings of the Neopalatial period. Significantly bull jumping is particularly prominent on those gold rings that are known to have stamped sealings found at multiple sites (Krzyszkowska 2005: 189-190). What we have, then, is one of the main bodies of symbolism at peak sanctuaries resonating with objects which are mobilized by some of the wealthiest and best-connected in Minoan society.

My point here is not that the elite was the only group building connections with peak sanctuaries. Indeed, the opposite can be shown to be true. House N at Palaikastro (Sackett and Popham 1965: 252-268; 1970: 215-231) is particularly interesting in this regard because, like the stone vases, it too attests to symbolic resonances with peak sanctuaries across multiple dimensions. The household's drinking sets were equipped with two rhyta, one shaped like an agrimi, the other like a beetle, both common peak sanctuary images and the latter rarely attested anywhere else. Moreover, the house was equipped with a set of horns of consecration, as we have seen a symbol closely connected to peak sanctuaries. But this house is unremarkable architecturally, and not one of the larger buildings in the town, suggesting modest households too could claim links to peak sanctuaries.

Nevertheless, what this analysis should show is that the highest elite in Minoan society was very engaged at a symbolic level with making connections to peak sanctuaries. And this presents us with a problem, which is the apparent dissonance between this elite engagement and the predominantly understated material from the peak sanctuaries themselves. Given that the Minoan elite was capable of commissioning monumental buildings and extraordinary craft objects from rare materials why do we not find more of these items at peak sanctuaries? This question may be the key to understanding the social place of peak sanctuaries.

Modelling peak sanctuaries in Minoan society

The answer to the dissonant understated nature of peak sanctuary assemblages may lie in the nature of the symbolic resonances that the elite images seek to build. As we have seen a strong theme is to do with male physical competition and violence: the raw physical ability to pummel an opponent in a boxing match, to chase a goat over a rocky landscape, to leap over or wrestle a bull. The terracotta figurines of bulls would have brought these physical abilities to mind, as would

the bronze or terracotta figurines of lithe men in the same loin clothes and cod pieces worn by athletes on relief stone vases, or the terracotta limbs of boxers. But these objects did so in ways that understated wealth. By doing so, I would argue, they had the effect of concentrating the attention on the physically competitive characteristic that they evoke. An elite bull jumper by dedicating a simple clay model of the bull that he had overcome concentrated the viewer's mind on his physical dominance rather than his wealth as his distinguishing characteristic.

The blandness of the Minoan votives, in effect, focussed the attention from the object towards the physical competition, the boxing and bull jumping, that the object was commemorating, keeping competition in the realm of the physical skill rather than wealth display. Here we can return to the traditionalism, the long running consistencies in the figurine record that Zeimbeki noticed. This might betoken considerable social pressure to maintain consistency with what was done in the past. These two phenomena can be combined as the underlying ideological framework of peak sanctuary dedication. Anthropologists, like Mary Helms (1998), who collect and look for consistencies across societies, believe that many aristocracies are consistent in two respects: first, they claim connections to the deep and distant past and, second, they claim to be actually, physically, really, superior to everybody else. In many traditional societies, and we do not have to go that far to seek parallels, the latter claim is true enough: better diets, education, time to practice skills that others cannot afford, allow elites to really be better, in an immediate sense, than those less fortunate. By keeping to a fairly constrained and materially unremarkable set of votives, I would suggest, the Minoan elite both cemented its association with age old practice and maintained the emphasis on the skills and physical prowess, that only they had the resources and leisure to attain. There was no danger that a Neopalatial visitor to a sanctuary would fixate on the identity of the craftsman who created objects, or the object itself, rather than the act of skill it symbolised.

In some ways this argument is situated close to those of scholars, like Watrous or Haggis, that see peak sanctuaries as expressions of elite ideology, although it is far removed from Haggis' particular view of peak sanctuaries as organizational centres. Instead, it sees them as forums of competition, inherently a more multivalent vision, one that mirrors emanations from the elite with those from the rest of society. The dampening of expressions of elite wealth, the focussing on expressions of 'innate' ability and traditionalism are suggestive of pressures from broader society who, as we have seen, were materially capable of involvement as peers and who themselves built symbolic connections to these cults. Competition is a form of dialogue and putting the emphasis on dialogue

may resolve many of the dichotomies that unilateral equation of peak sanctuaries with one group or another otherwise establishes.

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